THE SYNOPSIS OF THE PROPOSED PhD THESIS ON "PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE"

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Objectives of the Study

The present thesis titled "***Philosophy of Religion – A Marxist Perspective***" is an attempt to study the contribution of Karl Marx to the field of philosophy, religion and economics. The primary purpose of the thesis is to trace the initiative taken by Karl Marx to decipher as to how religion is used as an instrument of power relations and as an ideology by the oppressor to protect their material interests. On the contrary, it is also discussed as to how the oppressed class also use religion as the inverted consciousness about the world within the thesis. In view of fulfilling these aspects, the thesis finds the following issues to be studied by the researcher:

- The historical, material and dialectical basis of the philosophy of religion.
- The dialectical relationship between the socio-economic base and the superstructure.
- Karl Marx's dispersed thoughts on religion in his works.
- Marxist idea of alienation on the grounds of religion.
- The intersection between class and religion.

The Context

Though Marx lived in 19h century, his thoughts on the economical basis of the formation of religious ideas are still relevant and we find the revival and re-reading of Marxism with the collapse of capitalist economy world over.

In the past, humans became religious out of fear of the unnatural material events. But nowadays religion is used as the identity of man though its internal mechanisms though its past remains have not completely vanished. Religion plays the role of ideology either to strengthen the oppression and to maintain the power over the oppressed to safeguard the oppressor's material interests. Though religion is said to be a spiritual venture, Marx identified that such spirituality has its material basis. Nowadays most of the religions talk about peace, brotherhood and universal equality. But the question is whether such notions can be realised without addressing the problems of unequal social structure and skewed distribution of wealth. In the modern context globalisation, the role of religion in society, economy, politics and cultural arena are important subjects of the study.

The Theme

The present study aims to enter into a systematic analysis of the contribution of Karl Marx to the field of philosophy of religion, especially on the socio-economic basis of religion. In the end part of this thesis, how the religion can act as an agency for emancipation of the suppressed is further analysed using Antonio Gramsci's notions of subaltern, hegemony and the elite.

The Research Issues

Taking the above mentioned theme of the thesis, the researcher identifies the following research issues for the analysis:-

- How the religious ideas and practices are rooted in socio-economic basis?
- What is dialectics and what is the dialectical relation between economic basis and socio-cultural superstructure? What is the relation between religion and mode of production?
- How religion functions as the ideology of the oppressor and at the same time as the opium for the masses and as the heart of heartless world? How does class affect the religion?
- What is the relation between alienation and religion?
- How religion can/may function as an agency for emancipation for the subaltern masses?

The Scope of the Study

The main emphasis of this study is to take cognizance of the socio-economic foundation of religion according to Karl Marx. Marx had broader understanding of religion, philosophy, politics, economy and society which makes the oppressed to be conscious of all kinds of oppression, domination, suppression, misery etc.

Further, the religion is understood normally as a spiritual venture. But the social philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists have underscored the material basis of religiosity of a person. This aspect of the social basis of religion needs a thorough study, if the social problems surrounding us are to be abolished.

The Methodology

The overall methodological framework is philosophical analysis of the social functioning of religion. Towards this end, the descriptive methodology will be used to explain Marx's dispersed writings on religion. Further, the critical and analytic method will be used to bring forth the meanings and interpretations of Marx's notions on religion. However, as the thesis deals with Marxist philosophy of religion, the dialectical approach will be used to enlighten the socio-historical process of religion. As Marx understood religion as a sociological issue rather than as a theological or

scholastic issue, the structural-functional approach may also be used in this research to highlight the social basis of religion.

The Sources

The thesis attempts to study the contribution of Marxism in the field of philosophy, religion and socio-economic thought. The researcher treats the English translation of the original writings of Marx as the primary source of the study. The books, articles, journals and other published works on Marxism by authentic writers are treated as the secondary sources. A detailed bibliography and references are presented at the end of the thesis.

Content

The introductory chapter discuss the objectives of the study, the context, the theme, the research issues, the scope of the study, the methodology, and the sources of the study.

The second chapter discusses the Marxist dialectics of ***Base and Superstructure***. In Marxist theory, social structure consists of two parts – base and superstructure. Base and superstructure designate the social relations of a historically determined society as a total system in which material relations represent the real base or the foundation of society and on the other hand the political, religious, philosophical and ideological relations etc., represent the superstructure which rises upon the given base and is determined by the base.

Marxist philosophy used dialectic materialism as a way of interpretation of human civilisation, what is known as materialistic interpretation of history or socioeconomic interpretation of history. According to this theory, what happens in history or society are created by materialistic or socioeconomic circumstances. What man has founded from the primitive age to till now, like religion, marriage system, art, culture, civilisation are all determined by material and socioeconomic environment. For this reason Marx believes that socioeconomic conditions are the base of all things. The socioeconomic conditions of a given society determine its social, religious and cultural life. So, we can say that civilisation of a particular stage entirely depends upon the socioeconomic condition or economic environment of that stage. For example, the socioeconomic environment of primitive age was based on slavery, that of feudalism in mediaeval age and of capitalism in the modern age. According to Marxist theory, in the future a new socioeconomic environment will arise up within the womb of modern capitalist society, which would replace the entire socioeconomic system of capitalism and establish a new socioeconomic system according to which the entire superstructure will be transform into different shape.

The connection between base and superstructure has a dialectical character. According to the Marxist dialectical theory, having once arisen on a certain base, a superstructure reacts upon the base

and on the development of society as a whole. While the superstructure often affects the base but the relation is not strictly one way relationship. Marx and Engels warned against such economic determinism. According Marxism, the whole social system transform through the dialectical way.

The third chapter is about ***Intersection of Class and Religion*** and it will discuss how class and religion affect each other. Intersection means the dialectical relation between the binaries of a system of oppression/discrimination and domination. Here, class is an economical category and religion is a cultural category belonging to the superstructure of a particular society.

Religion, for Marx, is a human product. In short, to Marx religion does not reflect man's true consciousness. Religion, as Marx sees it, is a false consciousness and is the product of man, the product of those in powers – those who control the productive forces. Marx was one of the social scientist to focus mainly on social class. In Marx's view, the relationship among people is determined primarily through the mode of economic production. Who owns the means of production such as the land, resources, and factories are the dominant class and those who do not own the means of production but sell their labour to eke out a living under the control of the dominant class are termed as the dominated people. According to him, in the present bourgeoisie social structure, religion is used by the ruling class as a means to substantiate the oppression.

The social conflict approach is rooted in Karl Marx's critique of capitalism. According to Marx, in a capitalist society, religion plays a critical role in maintaining an unequal status, in which certain class of people have more resources and power than other class of people. Marx argued that religion is able to do this by promising reward in the after-life, instead of in this life. It was in this sense that Marx says religion is the sign of oppressed creature and is the opium of the people. Thus, the social conflict approach to religion highlights how religion, as a phenomenon of human behaviour, functions to maintain social inequality by proving a world view that justifies oppression.

The fourth chapter is ***Religion as Ideology***; it will discuss how the powerful or capitalist people used religion as an ideology to protect the wealth, to protect themselves and to maintain their power over people. For Marx, religion is an ideology, a dominant ideology of exploitation. The sociological analysis of Marx involves a double discourse – the two mode of interpretation. In the first process men united in society and engaged in production; this process leads to concepts, ideas, values and institutions which are the indirect product of social process of production. The second process is a fact where history involves the development of exploitation. This process also leads to formulation of ideas, concepts, values etc. But these are geared to operate exploitation and it involves giving the appearance of legitimacy to exploitation, as well as hiding the true nature of exploitation. This second process Marx called it 'ideology'.

Marx had explained ideology as illusion, mystification or inversion. It is illusory in the sense that it reifies what are essentially social relations of exploitations. For Marx, ideology is a critical concept and it is unhelpful to equate with culture or with consciousness. He conceived of ideology as a part of the superstructure and recognised that there were forms of consciousness that are non- ideological.

Marx denies religion as an autonomous cultural phenomenon. He believed that religion could be understood only by examining a specific historical circumstance and its linkage between religion as a form of ideology and socio-economic life. Such linkages were complex and there was no simple mechanistic relationship between the base and superstructure. The earlier religious beliefs arose from primitive man's helplessness in his struggle against nature. But in the modern class society it is rooted in his struggle against his fellow human in order to amass surplus.

In the 'German Ideology', Marx discussed the ideas of ruling class, the class which is ruling the material forces of society. Here he said that, religion is an expression of material realities and of economic injustice. He believed that the problem in religion is ultimately the problems in the society. Religion is not the disease, but merely a symptom. It is used by oppressors to make the people feel better, the distress they experience due to being poor and exploited. That is why Marx said that religion is the opium of the masses. Religion is thus seen as a means of power whereby the dominant class mystify and control the peasants in feudal society and the worker in capitalism.

Engels believed that religion is not a unitary phenomenon. Religion serves the interests of ruling class as an ideology of power and the class interests are also indirectly expressed through religion. According to him, religion is the fantastic reflection of man's mind of those external forces which control their daily life. Marx and Engels both recognised that to attack religion without attacking the social order in which it grows, is to engage in ideological shadowboxing.

The fifth chapter is titled as ***Religion as Subaltern Agency***; it will discuss how religion helps the subaltern for their emancipation. Subaltern, means 'of inferior', is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer those groups in society who are subjects to the hegemony of the ruling class. Subaltern classes mainly include peasants, workers and other groups denied access to hegemonic power, because the history is being the history of states and dominant groups.

Gramsci claimed that the history of the subaltern classes was just as complex as the history of the dominant classes. For him, the history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic, since they are always subject to the activity of the ruling groups, even when they rebel. Clearly they have less access to the means by which they may control their own representation and less access to cultural and social institution. Only permanent victory can break that pattern of subordination and even that does not occur immediately.

The final chapter, titled, ***Conclusion***, will analyse the content of the afore-mentioned discussions and it will bring out a thesis on how the socio-economic basis determines and gives birth to the religious structure, ideas, institutions and aspirations of a particular society. This chapter will also include the discussions of Marxists, who followed Marx's theory, on religion and to come to a better understanding of Marxist philosophy of religion in the light of the current socio-economic developments.

Limitations

Marxist theory is associated with various fields of knowledge, such as political, economical, sociological, philosophical and cultural fields. This work does not discuss the various fields in their separation and in their exhaustion. But all these areas are studied in their inter-relations centering around the field of study of religion.

Most of the original writings of Marx are in German language. The researcher's knowledge of this language is inadequate. Therefore, the researcher has to depend mostly upon the English translations of Marx's writings.

Further, the study is limited to the study of Marx's understanding of religion. The works of Engels and Gramsci's Marxian understanding are given due weightage in this thesis. In the concluding chapter, the understandings of Marxists such as Ernst Bloch, Terry Eagleton and others will be discussed, but not exhaustively.

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